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TAGS: [KCFE](#) [NATO](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#) [GG](#) [MD](#)
SUBJECT: CFE: A/S FRIED'S DECEMBER 17 MEETING WITH
RUSSIAN DISARMAMENT DIRECTOR ANTONOV YIELDS FRANK TALK AND
REPETITION OF RUSSIAN MAXIMALISM

Classified By: EUR A/S DAN FRIED FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) EUR Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried and an interagency team met for five-plus hours December 17 in Geneva to review the status of the CFE Parallel Actions Package with Russian Disarmament Director Anatoliy Antonov and his experts. The discussion combined Russian maximalism on CFE -- and many of Prime Minister Putin's colorful indictments of the current Treaty -- with one of the most interesting and concrete discussions of specific ideas that we have had in many months (probably not since fall 2007). Russian posturing echoed U/S Rood's meetings on other topics, with the Russian team explicitly staking out ground for dealing with the next U.S. Administration. Discussion touched broadly on all the major elements of the package, but the meeting focused substantively on three issues: Georgia, the flank, and Russia's suspension. On the flank, the Russian message was explicit: Antonov asked Fried to "tell the Obama Administration that there will never be a deal on CFE unless subceilings on Russia's forces on its territory are eliminated."

¶2. (C) Process -- in particular the way ahead for U.S.-Russia and NATO-Russia dialogue on CFE in light of the impending change of Administration in the U.S. -- was also a major theme. Antonov and Fried agreed that it would be important to have a follow-on US-Russia meeting in the new year, certainly prior to any German-hosted CFE-wide seminar event on lines suggested by German Foreign Minister Steinmeier at the OSCE Ministerial. Fried expressed openness to the idea of expanded participation by affected countries in some of the U.S.-Russia bilateral exchanges. Antonov made clear that he thought both the U.S.-Russia channel, and some expanded discussion, were needed. He observed that any event involving all 30 CFE states, such as Steinmeier appeared to be proposing, would not in the end offer a venue for actually solving issues. Antonov gave no indication, however, that he would attempt to dissuade the Germans from going ahead with plans for a CFE event in spring 2009.

¶3. (SBU) A/S Fried was accompanied by VCI DAS Karin Look, EUR/RPM Jennifer Laurendeau, CFE Expert Michael Powell, VCI/CCA Lt Col Kathryn Ducceschi, DoD JCS Col Darren Hartford, and OSD Peter Perenyi. In addition to Antonov, the Russian team included: Anton Mazur, Sergey Federyakov, and Col Vladislav Golubev, an MOD expert serving with Russia's JCG delegation. End Summary.

A Half-day of Russian Maximalism...

14. (C) Antonov used the first three hours of the meeting to underscore familiar maximalist positions on the Parallel Actions Package in general, arguing again that, on a number of specific points, the package is really "Russian actions for NATO promises," rather than equal obligations. Antonov resurfaced the argument that the U.S. had walked back from the October 2007 parallel actions proposal, largely because of the positions of its friends and Allies. He said the U.S. had not incorporated key Russian concerns into the package, mentioning that there were a number of places in the text where NATO commitments were expressed conditionally, while Russia was expected to take decisive action. He suggested that "would" should be "will" where it concerned movement by NATO Allies on ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty; the U.S. and Russia should agree on a definition of "substantial combat forces," not just "consider" one; and parameters should be established for Baltic accession to CFE as part of the parallel actions discussion. That is, Russia wants the terms for Baltic accession set out in the near term, rather than in the future as part of their formal CFE accession process, after the Adapted Treaty has been ratified by all current CFE States and entered into force. Antonov did not dwell in specific terms on the Russian proposal to establish a collective ceiling on the equipment holdings of all the members of NATO, but he called for "parity" between NATO and Russia, claiming that Russia is concerned by U.S. establishment of "new bases" in Bulgaria and Romania, by the

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15. (C) A/S Fried observed that while he wanted to avoid polemics, it was important to make clear that neither the U.S. nor NATO Allies accepted this vision of Russia as disadvantaged either by NATO enlargement or by the CFE Treaty. Far from building up to threaten Russia, in fact the equipment holdings of NATO allies had dropped dramatically in the last ten years. Fried recalled that while the U.S. equipment ceiling for tanks under the current CFE Treaty is approximately 4000, in fact, the U.S. has 90 tanks in Europe today, according to our current CFE data. Fried warned that ideas like parity between NATO and Russia seem like an effort to re-establish dividing lines that the Adapted Treaty was designed to do away with.

16. (C) Comment: Antonov's comments about the evolution of the parallel actions package and on Russia's perception of threats from an advancing NATO are old chestnuts, which have long-since been answered in previous U.S.-Russian CFE discussions with extensive briefings on key issues, such as U.S. plans for rotational training in Bulgaria and Romania. It appeared that Antonov was recapitulating the full litany of Russia's CFE concerns for the record, in advance of the U.S. change of administration. When Fried offered to review the text of the package and determine where language could be refined, so the new Administration's team could receive the most up-to-date picture, Antonov demurred. He made clear that he did not want to engage in line-in/out at this point and was saving any flexibility for the future, preferring to inveigh against the U.S. and NATO for loss of time as a result of our non-engagement following the Russian attack on Georgia, and for "unhelpful" accusatory statements in Vienna and Brussels. End Comment

17. (C) Antonov was visibly surprised when the U.S. advanced specific ideas for updating the Georgia portion of the parallel actions package. He agreed to take back to Moscow the three bullets the U.S. and Georgia had agreed as a basis for updating the Georgia portion of the package (text at para 9 below). While Antonov and veteran Russian CFE expert Anton Mazur asked thoughtful questions about the specifics, Antonov claimed that he did not see why steps on Georgia were an essential element of a CFE solution, particularly in the wake of Russia's military action. Despite the posturing, Antonov did not return to the earlier Russian suggestion that Georgia and Moldova do not belong in a CFE package: in fact, Antonov suggested that the U.S. and Russia were probably closest to agreement on Moldova, which was not discussed in detail. In a private dinner with Fried that evening, Antonov (who claimed to have spoken to Lavrov) said that what the U.S. envisioned on Georgia was too far-reaching; but Moscow would try to come up with some ideas of its own.

18. (C) In presenting the new ideas on Georgia, Fried stressed that one of the reasons the U.S. had not resumed bilateral discussions with Russia on CFE in fall 2008 was the need to identify a way forward on CFE and Georgia in light of Russia's military action in August, and Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries. From a CFE perspective, the presence of significant Russian forces on Georgian territory without Georgia's consent was obviously a huge issue. The U.S. and NATO consider South Ossetia and Abkhazia to be part of Georgia. The principle of host nation consent to the presence of foreign forces is explicitly contained in CFE. Until August Russia had been withdrawing its presence from Georgia in accordance with the Istanbul commitments and only one issue was left -- Gudauta. But Russia's actions in August, and its announced basing plans, had changed that picture. To move forward on ratification of Adapted CFE we would need creative ideas -- that Georgia could support -- to address the situation we now face in Georgia.

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19. (C) Fried said the ideas we had developed represented a major effort by the Georgians and the U.S. to find a way to prevent our efforts to save CFE from being derailed by Russian actions in Georgia. In effect our proposal acknowledged that Russia would have forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia for a long while. Fried characterized this as a major gain for Russia; the immediate benefit to Georgia was the transparency provided. These ideas were crafted, explicitly, not to deviate from the principles and goals of the August cease fire agreement and CFE itself. Fried shared three bullets:

- Withdrawal of all Russian Treaty Limited Equipment (TLE) from the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia;
- An international presence at Gudauta and other relevant facilities;
- A transparency and verification regime, using Adapted CFE modalities to provide information on and monitor the number and armament of:
 - Russian military, security and other forces in the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as a tool to observe and facilitate full implementation of the military withdrawal elements of the August 12 ceasefire agreement;
 - Russian military forces in the North Caucasus Military District;
 - Comparable Georgian forces.

10. (C) Antonov immediately objected that the South Ossetians and Abkhaz are not part of CFE; and that Russia could never agree to language that referred to those countries as "the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia," and objected to the characterization of August's events as a "war," preferring to call it a "Caucasus crisis."

Fried said dryly that as a practical matter we would have to find a political way forward to avoid creating a black hole. Nobody besides Russia and Nicaragua considered those regions independent countries. That was the reality. The U.S. assumed that Russia would be in a position to significantly influence their approach. The Russians then asked a number of substantive questions about the specifics of the transparency measures:

-- What type of international presence did we envision at Gudauta? (Answer: This is for negotiation, not a take-it-or-leave-it package. An OSCE presence was an obvious choice. Other options might build on the UN role in Abkhazia, for example. A permanent presence was possible, or one could envision a periodic presence, but something more than inspection team visits.)

-- What other "relevant facilities" would be covered by this provision? (Answer: Russia had announced that it would establish major garrisons at several locations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. They would be covered.)

-- Why would we use CFE modalities for transparency if all the TLE had been withdrawn? (Answer: The Adapted CFE modalities we envisioned to utilize were a good basis because they had already been agreed, and we knew how to apply them. The Russian military presence was significant no matter what its armament. Russian statements suggested that Russia envisioned a presence that would include TLE for some time.)

-- Why should all of the NCMD be included in these measures?

Would there be double coverage for inspections, in CFE and via this agreement? (Answer: At this point double coverage is not an issue, since Russia is not implementing CFE. It may be that some parts of the NCMD are not relevant to the security situation in Georgia; that could be discussed.

Those that are should be covered by the measures. Georgia has agreed to provide comparable transparency regarding its own forces; this is something Russia has claimed is needed.)

-- Why does the language refer to Russian "military, security, and other forces?" (Answer: We want it to be clear that all Russian military forces should be encompassed.

A shoulder patch that says "peacekeeping" should not serve as a basis for exclusion. There was no intention to capture civilian humanitarian efforts; but "railway workers" that are actually troops would be covered.)

¶11. (C) Comment: Despite the number of Russian questions and their level of detail, it was clear at the outset that the Russian team considered the U.S./Georgian ideas to be overly ambitious, though they agreed to report them to Moscow immediately. (In the full meeting, Antonov asked "why should we do this? We didn't lose the war.") It remains to be seen whether Antonov's private claim to Fried, that Russia would respond to the U.S. with some ideas of its own, will yield useful input. Antonov's interest in knowing how widely the specifics of the U.S. ideas have been shared with NATO Allies

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...And frank talk about the Flank issue

¶12. (C) While the U.S. pushed for serious thinking about how to address the situation in Georgia via CFE, for their part the Russian team pressed for a U.S. reaction to the Baluyevskiy flank proposal, insisting that there would never be an agreed Parallel Actions Package if Russia's concerns on the flank were not addressed.

-- Fried and team made clear that changing the flank regime before the Adapted Treaty entered into force seemed like an impossibility: it was hard to imagine how key players, like Turkey or the U.S., could ratify the Adapted Treaty in its current form, if there was a deal to revise one of its core limits already in place. Changes to the flank should be an issue for after entry into force. Antonov interjected that if the political will was there, this could be solved in the near term.

-- On substance, Fried told Antonov flatly that the

Baluyevskiy proposal amounted to abolition of the flank for Russia and its retention for all others, including the Baltics: its only real effect was to re-label Russia's overall ceiling for the area of application as its flank limit, which meant that in theory Russia could locate its entire force structure in the NCMD.

¶13. (C) The Russian team countered that didn't have to be the end of the story. They made clear that Russia's bottom line is that there could be no legal subceilings restricting movement of Russian forces on its territory. Three times Antonov interrupted the flow of discussion to ask Fried to convey this message to the incoming Administration, citing the strong personal views of Putin on this matter. However, Antonov also took pains to recount the history of the flank, underscoring that the regime was originally designed to prevent Soviet forces that were being withdrawn from Eastern Europe from being concentrated in the north or south. The context that created the regime, he argued, was long past. He sought to modify Fried's summary of the Baluyevskiy proposal, noting that if Russia's entire territory became part of the flank, Russia would be subject to the Adapted CFE Treaty's brigade-level temporary deployment provision, not the larger division-sized "exceptional" temporary deployment provision that attached to the flank. Nor would Russia be able to get additional TLE allocations from Belarus or Kazakhstan, which are not flank countries. CFE expert Jennifer Laurendeau dismissed these points out of hand: Russia's overall ceiling for the area of application was so large that it dwarfed the holdings of any neighbor. Russia's TD level was essentially irrelevant to the balance in the region.

¶14. (C) Fried seconded her analysis and sharply countered Antonov's main message that Europe had moved beyond the need for flank limits: Russia's attack on Georgia, combined with its suspension of CFE, had fueled reasonable concerns about Russia's forces and intentions. In the wake of Russia's attack, it was not only Turkey, but many Allies, who believed that the flank limits are now more significant, not less, than in the past. Antonov countered that he had discussed the flank with Norwegian officials, and they did not seem worried about the balance of forces in their neighborhood. Laurendeau asked whether Russia was prepared to honor the political commitments it made at Istanbul regarding force levels in Pskov and Kaliningrad, and with regard to the Leningrad Military District (LEMD) as a whole (the last was a private commitment between Norway and Russia on no-increase in the LEMD). Antonov briefly noted that Russia's 1999 commitment not to significantly increase its permanently stationed forces in the two regions was predicated on "the present politico-military situation," which he said had changed with NATO enlargement to include the Baltics. But he concluded that it was likely Russia would honor those commitments, even if there was no CFE flank regime. It appeared as well that Antonov thought it likely that Russia would consider comparable political commitments or "CSBM" ideas for the south, if the legal limits were dropped. The Russian team said they could not put this proposal on the table formally at this point, and stressed that Putin would insist on elimination of legal restrictions on where Russia can locate forces on its own territory.

¶15. (C) Antonov asked if the U.S. understood Turkey's position on the flank. The Turks had said they were open to

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abandoning the principle of flank limits applying to a group of countries in the region, and a part of Russian (and Ukrainian) territory.

¶16. (C) Comment: The exchange on the flank was frank and informal. Antonov and his experts grasp the problem of asking NATO members to negotiate a major change to a Treaty that is not yet in force -- a course that might make Adapted CFE unratifiable. But there is no doubt -- and Antonov confirmed this to Fried privately -- that the Russian team faces a Putin-derived imperative regarding elimination of the flank limits for Russia. It is less clear whether Russia's desire to maintain the flank regime for other Treaty members (while it is eliminated for Russia) also comes from top levels of the Russian government; Antonov appears to recognize that as a twofer, this position is flatly not negotiable. Regarding the Russian flank itself, this meeting was the first time the Russian team has been prepared to discuss openly the notion of a substitute, where political commitments take the place of the current Treaty's legal limits. However, for Turkey - and a number of other Allies - the flank is the core of the Treaty, and they would most likely reject this idea, particularly if it is accompanied by a reduction in the special transparency provisions that apply to the flank. End comment.

Next Steps

¶17. (C) Looking ahead, Fried and Antonov returned to the question of Russia's resuming implementation of the Treaty. Antonov highlighted that Russia does not agree with the last sentence of the parallel actions package, which says that Russia will resume implementation of the current Treaty once the parallel actions package is agreed. He acknowledged that this was the first time he had objected to the text. Citing the "actions for promises" theme, he asserted that the rest of the package would have to be definite, with specific agreements reached, for Russia to resume implementation. Fried countered that it was Russia that had ceased implementing the Treaty, and he doubted that NATO Allies would be prepared to "buy" Russia's return to fulfillment of obligations it is legally committed to meet. Moreover, it was hard to see how Allies could ratify the Adapted Treaty if Russia was not implementing any part of CFE. Antonov hinted that there might be conditions where Russia could resume implementation of some portion of the CFE "regime" (vice, the current Treaty), such as the information exchange, or inspections. But not the flank limitations.

¶18. (C) Given the number and complexity of the issues, all agreed that it would be desirable for the U.S. and Russia to meet again early in the new year if possible. Antonov expressed interest in expanding participation to include the Quad plus Italy in subsequent discussions; Fried reiterated his July message that he was open to expanding participation, but suggested that those allies most interested in the specific substantive issues (like Turkey and Norway on the flank issue, or the Baltics on their issues) needed to be involved. He noted that he personally might not be involved, due to the change of Administration, but he would ensure the transition team was fully briefed.

¶19. (C) Fried and Antonov agreed to communicate again in the next month to review the status of the issues and options for resuming discussions.

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